

Animal Identification Steering Committee Meeting
February 11, 2005
Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Lower 1 and 2 conference rooms
9:00 a.m. - noon

Those present:

Gary Penny, Brand Inspectors
Larry Hayhurst, Brand Inspectors
James England, University of Idaho, Caine Veterinary Teaching Center
Jason Ahola, University of Idaho Extension, Caldwell R & E Center
Ramona Ridley, Simplot
Jim Little, independent rancher
Rochelle Oxarango, independent rancher/Idaho Wool Growers Association
Clint Evans, Elk Breeders of Idaho
Kliff Bramwell, veterinarian
Earl Lilley, Idaho Horse Council
Lindsey Manning, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley
Beth Patten, Salmon Creek Farms Marketing Association
Jay McCown, Biomark Livestock, Inc.
Jennifer Smith, ISDA
Jim Stewart, Idaho Dairymen's Association
Susan Lee, Idaho Dairyman's Association
Mark Owens, Biomark, Inc.
Lloyd Knight, Idaho Cattle Association
Julie Morrison, Idaho Cattle Association
Marv Patten, ISDA
Clint Evans, Idaho Elk Breeders Association
John Chatburn, ISDA
Dean Park, Biomark, Inc.
Amy Van Hoover, ISDA

Dr. Siroky opened the meeting at 9:10 with a discussion of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) data management. Dr. Siroky said the system is driven by animal health needs, rather than IT or EID tag companies. The issue is how much data is actually needed. The states without animal identification agencies are struggling.

Dr. Siroky asked Rick Stott to offer a perspective on a recent National Cattleman's Beef Association (NCBA) convention.

Rick Stott told the committee that from what he'd heard at the meetings, other projects are moving slowly in comparison to Idaho and the Northwest Pilot Project. Rick said that Texas cattle feeders had come to him with questions about our project. The NCBA is taking a neutral position. Rick said that he and Julie Morrison had attended an animal working group meeting, where the discussion centered on issues such as "minimum required retention rate" on tags.

Dr. Siroky said that the NAIS can't be production driven, but it can be value-added. As an animal health agency, ISDA only needs 3 or 4 pieces of information for an effective animal health system.

Dr. Siroky gave the example of England's system for animal identification. There is a dissertation that explains that country's biggest problem relates to the lack of documentation

on animal movement handoffs, which Dr. Siroky labeled as chronologically paired events. The United States' NAIS must be 100% reportable, if it is to work.

Dr. Siroky discussed the Uniform Methods and Rules (UM&R) document. USDA's attorneys say it can't be named a UM&R - it can only be an informational document. As for the USDA's Strategic Plan, implementation dates have been changed to later dates. USDA is working through many issues.

Rick Stott asked Dr. Siroky for a perspective on the speed of the process. Dr. Siroky discussed rules, which he said can only be created in pieces. Right now, the only rulemaking issue is premises. Perhaps in a year, individual swine and cattle movements might need to be addressed. Dr. Siroky added that no one knows enough about the technology to effectively create rules. He did say that the system wouldn't be mandatory until 2008, at least, as the infrastructure isn't in place yet. Rick Stott said there is speculation about regulations to dictate states' efforts.

Dr. Siroky said he has had concerns for a long time about maintaining flexibility in the system for states. Epidemiology only dictates knowing movement from point a to point b. Registering the home place is good enough; this maintains the flexibility. If an owner moves animals between their own facilities, the state doesn't need to know. Currently, tracing capabilities are limited to 25%, but 80% would benefit traceback efforts. Rick Stott said the group/lot concept is now being adopted by the beef working group.

There was a discussion of the differences between the eastern and western halves of the U.S. This is because of grazing allotments. Lloyd Knight said that Rick Stott was working with eastern states on organization. Dr. Siroky commented that it was hard for some states to learn new methods. Dr. Siroky explained that the Idaho Coalition project tries to prove several ideas. This includes determining how veterinary clinics interact and their role: could they also be information disseminators and tag issuers? Deb Lawrence commented that the best suggestions were coming from participants.

Jim Little asked how widely distributed ISDA's animal ID informational letter was. Dr. Siroky told him that 25,000 letters were sent to producers throughout the state. The mailing list came from a list of registered brands. Addresses compatible with the national system received premises identification numbers. Jim Little commented that he didn't receive the letter, although his brand registration is with an actual physical address. He added that a copy of the letter came addressed to his mother, who is deceased. Rick Stott also said that he didn't receive a letter.

John Chatburn commented that for premises registration purposes, perhaps livestock investigators could come to locations that don't have a 911 address to take a GPS reading. Jim Little commented that this was a hole in the system. Dr. Siroky said it shows a problem with a centralized database.

Rochelle Oxarango asked for clarification on whether she would receive 2 premises numbers, as she had received 2 letters. Dr. Lawrence told her she would only receive one number. Dr. Siroky suggested that a renewable process, perhaps online, would solve the problem of incorrect registrations. Dr. Siroky added that he wanted to offer as much information as possible to the public, through public meetings and other methods. Jim Little said that information needs to be distributed to all addresses, regardless of whether it goes to a P.O. box or a 911 address. Dr. Lawrence said that information came from brand registrations, as well as from dairy lists.

Lloyd Knight asked about responses to the mailing. Dr. Lawrence said the response was even for positive and negative. Questions ranged from “when does it start”, to “will it put me out of business”. She said it was her opinion that negative responses were based on a lack of understanding of the epidemiology. Dr. Lawrence received 23 responses. Amy Van Hoover said she’d received approximately 20 responses regarding address changes. These included information on addresses for people who were either deceased or had moved. Larry Hayhurst said his office received about 10 calls. He told everyone that it was normal for brands to be kept in the family after the original owner dies. Lloyd Knight said he was surprised at the lack of responses. Larry Hayhurst discussed the lack of response to brand mailings; he commented that some people might not have even opened the letter. Dr. Siroky said he didn’t expect a high number of responses. Lloyd Knight told everyone that he’d received feedback about the public’s concerns.

Dr. Lawrence told the committee that 16,000 premises were registered. Jim Stewart asked about the numbers. Dr. Lawrence said premises identification numbers consist of seven characters - both letters and numbers. ISDA sends address and telephone number information to Kansas and receives the registration number back. Dean Park asked the estimated number of premises in the state. Larry Hayhurst replied that there are 25,000 in the brand database.

Dr. Siroky said ISDA is just trying to get people involved before 2009, when tags and premises numbers will be mandatory. Information can be validated at a later date. This system is used for efficiency, rather than accuracy.

Susan Lee asked the mandatory date. Dr. Siroky answered that USDA’s strategic plan calls for mandatory premises registrations by then. The mandate can only be effective if there is a premise number to link to tags. Even if a premises isn’t registered, no consequences are foreseen.

Jim Stewart said he objected to limiting tag sales to registered premises. Dr. Siroky discussed the possibility of grandfathering old tag styles.

Dr. Lawrence said she thought that when people saw tagged cattle go through readers at feed lots, they would understand that the method works.

There was a discussion on tag requirements: frequencies, types, and brands. The committee also discussed methodologies and rules.

Susan Lee gave a brief report on the Emerging Issues Subcommittee. There is concern about privacy. Kliff Bramwell asked about the issues for dairies.

John Chatburn explained Idaho Code 25-207B, which provides an exemption from the state’s public records law. John told everyone that while information gathered for animal ID purposes is protected, existing public information stays public.

Gary Penny asked about the status of the federal privacy statute. Rick Stott told everyone that on his recent trip to Washington, D.C., USDA staff told him that legislation was necessary for to protect privacy; they also told him it shouldn’t be hard to pass the legislation. John Chatburn said that information still remains subject to the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Larry Hayhurst said dairy and beef producers are worried ISDA will just send inspectors to addresses on the premises list.

Dean Park told Rick Stott that at an NCBA meeting, he was told that whether information is in public or private databases, that information still remains subject to FOIA.

Rick Stott told everyone about Australia's system. The entire database is handled by 1.5 full-time employees. The entire animal ID program is handled by 6 people. The system is through a nonprofit entity that is funded by industry.

John Chatburn said that USDA maintains that if they can access the data, the data is still public. It's just like ISDA's public records case: in Idaho, if an agency can access data to ensure compliance, the information is public unless there's a specific exemption. Privacy was written into the animal ID statute for that purpose.

Dr. Siroky said that ISDA didn't care where records were kept, but that ISDA must administer the premises number issuance, and maintain information on animal movements. This is the only information ISDA needs.

Dr. Siroky said that Industry charges a fee for storing data.

Rick Stott said that AgriBeef's database uses 2 people to handle millions of transactions. Data storage is inexpensive. He again cited Australia's data management system as an example of a nonprofit entity managing the data, hardware, and software. Private companies need to make a profit to do this, so it would be best to have a nonprofit funded by industry. He told everyone he estimated less than \$1 million to do the entire national system.

Dr. Siroky told the committee that he thought it was acceptable for tag companies to access the premises number allocator to verify premises for tag sales. The responsibility for animal movement event records is the important part. Government must develop the software to achieve what is necessary.

Rick Stott told the committee he thought that education was one-sided thus far. The Idaho Cattle Association (ICA) has been trying to keep all associations on contact lists, but he was looking for comments on how to circulate the message.

Jim England told the committee that Education Subcommittee hadn't met yet.

John Chatburn told everyone the Rules Subcommittee hadn't met yet either. He said he was in the process of preparing a skeleton of a rule. When this was complete, he would forward it to subcommittee members. The subcommittee would meet in late March or early April. He would also send the "definitions" framework to subcommittee members. Some definitions are 70 years old, and they need to be changed.

Dr. Siroky said USDA needed to facilitate the IT process, without dictating IT specifications. The concept needs evaluated to determine what companies can do the processes. One entity might not be able to do the whole program. He said he was opposed to a centralized database.

Julie Morrison said the states need to work together to determine what works. She discussed the project in Kansas. Kansas is using multiple software types, along with different tags and hardware.

Dr. Lawrence said sample specifications would be helpful for explaining to those who call ISDA. Julie Morrison said there are different market segments, different entities, and a range of products for industry. Dr. Siroky commented that the system must work for industry and government, with a standard for everyone.

Dr. Lawrence said that if animals don't move, information doesn't need to be submitted. High priced equipment isn't necessary for regulatory purposes. Dr. Siroky said that ISDA only needs 4 pieces of information. ISDA's role through 2009 is education. He said that animal ID will be a revolutionary change for industry.

Mark Owen explained RFID technology. He said that the technology is improving, but that choice is limited. Dean Park told everyone that there is great benefit for the general public.

Rick Stott agreed that the end result would benefit industry. Quicker traceback for BSE cases could lower economic effects of a BSE-positive. Dr. Lawrence added that 400 calves were destroyed because USDA couldn't efficiently trace a BSE-positive cow. Dr. Siroky also said that when Japanese representatives came to a Kansas feedlot, the lack of tags was a huge issue.

Dr. Siroky said ISDA is regulatory, but it also provides education at this point. He told the committee that the Division of Animal Industries only needs to be an information source. Canada only has 5 types of tags.

Mark Owens said technology specifications are defined in the draft Uniform Methods and Rules (UM&R). Dr. Siroky said that issues still need to be defined; ISDA's role is ensuring that everyone can use the system. Mark Owens added that companies are still trying to sell tags that are known to be inferior.

Dr. Lawrence suggested that the latest version of the UM&R, dated February 1, 2005, be sent to committee members. Dr. Siroky reminded everyone that the document will change over time. Dean Park told the committee that the UM&R only lists a tag reading standard, rather than a performance standard. Dr. Siroky commented that Canada has performance standards for their 5 tag styles, and eventually the ID tags will need a USDA "stamp" of approval.

Lindsey Manning gave an update on the project at Duck Valley Indian Reservation. The tribe is working with ISDA to share information. Linda Cope and Dr. Lawrence recently traveled to Duck Valley for meetings with tribal representatives. The following week there was a meeting with producers and associations. The end result was a task force. There is a resolution to complete a census count to determine who has brands. This has revitalized their brand office. The last count, completed in 2000, showed 7,000 cattle and 3,000 horses on the reservation. There is also discussion about an ordinance on animal control. The tribe is successfully working on information technology issues.

Jay McCown gave an update on Treasure Valley Livestock. There was a test of portable readers. The reader captured data on 92 out of the 105 animals. There were problems with technologies. An upgrade to increase read abilities is necessary. They have also tested identifying cattle with different tag styles, tag orientations, and at different temperatures. Destron tags were used. The first test went well and Treasure Valley Livestock is trying to think ahead to determine different scenarios.

Julie Morrison told the committee about progress with the Northwest Pilot Project and provided a handout. There are 83 people participating right now. Larry Hayhurst commented about reports he'd heard on NWPP meetings. People were saying brands would become obsolete. There were definite misconceptions after meetings. Dr. Lawrence also commented that she'd received phone calls from people who receive incorrect information. Julie replied that communications had been challenging. Reporters still get the wrong message out after meetings. NWPP will continue to send the message.

Jim England told the committee he was working with 8 ranches, to tag a total of 2,500 head of cows. The problem with tagging is computers. He has 4 more ranches, with a total of 1,500 head that he will tag in the spring.

Dr. Lawrence told the committee that the dairy project was still under development. ISDA is working with Dr. Bramwell. As to the cervidae project, Linda Cope has gone to the field with ISDA's inspectors on several occasions. This is an excellent opportunity for ISDA.

Dr. Siroky explained that there are existing rules for cervidae operations. ISDA is trying to determine ways to read animal tags passively, validate the numbers, and create a system for reporting the information on a predetermined schedule. RFID technology can help to save the lives of animals during inventories.

Gary Penny asked if our congressional delegation is working on USDA's NAIS issues. Dr. Siroky answered that the strategic plan will be a road map. USDA needs 2 ½ years to write and pass rules. Industry lacks infrastructure at this point. Industry will want a benefit for a system and this is not quick to determine. He said there are many steps ahead and the process will be long. Larry Hayhurst asked if anyone has talked to Butch Otter about the issue. Dr. Siroky told Larry that the congressional delegation will need a budget cost. A meeting was planned for an earlier date, but there wasn't a budget to go along with everything. USDA is still completing an in-house analysis. Dr. Siroky said his opinion was that this analysis should be outsourced.

Jim Little said he was frustrated that the system was progressing so slowly. Other countries are ahead of the U.S. Dr. Siroky said that Canada completed its system quickly, but that there are problems with the system.

Larry Hayhurst said the goal is to open exports. Japan has a high BSE incidence. Rick Stott told the committee they test every animal for BSE. Japan didn't implement the feed ban until recently. Japan is our customer. Animal ID, at its present point, is a trade barrier. Dr. Siroky explained that Japan and Canada both have small numbers of animals to ID; consequently the system was easier to implement in those countries.

Dr. Siroky initiated a discussion on the tour of Jim Stewart's dairy. Jim Stewart told the committee that he has used a RFID system for 6 years. He uses Allflex tags with panel readers at the entryways to the milking stalls. He uses a computer with his own software and numbering to track. He began with 1,000 tags for 900 cows. He reuses his tags and he hasn't had to purchase any more since he started. He said the technology is reliable. The environment is wet; there is a great deal of metal; the equipment is abused. Jim did comment that you can't dictate which ear for the tag because of the variation in livestock working facilities.

Julie Morrison announced that NWPP will host a program presentation in Boise on May 8, 2005.

The next meeting will be scheduled for late April.